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USDA Inside USDA Information

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H.R. 5424 OPPOSED

You'll recall "Inside's" earlier mentions of H.R. 5424, the proposed National Publications Act of 1980 that would scrap Title 44 publishing and printing laws, disband the Joint Committee on Printing, and substitute a Commission which would regulate Federal printing. That bill was reported out of the House Administration Committee on March 19. At that time, the House Government Operations Committee claimed an interest in the bill.

The latest development is that the House Operations Committee has held its hearing, where Nelson Fitton, head of GPA's Publishing Center, attended on behalf of the USDA. Fitton reports that the three witnesses were Jim Tozzi, OMB; Samuel Saylor, acting Public Printer; and John Grant, Printing Industries of America, Inc. All opposed the bill.

Tozzi claimed that it would cost too much to set up the new organization, that it would create inefficiencies and higher costs, and would create a public monopoly unresponsive to the Executive Branch. Saylor said the bill went too far in trying to correct deficiencies in Title 44 and would subject the system to more political influence. Grant said the part-time commission would lead to bickering among adversary interests and would have far-reaching adverse effects on the printing industry and the Federal printing operation.

We'll keep you informed of the next developments.

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SOMEBODY ALREADY
DOING IT?

A problem in information work is knowing what others are doing so that you don't duplicate something already being done. We've found that the GSA's Consumer Information Center (CIC) can be a big help in avoiding duplication of publications in the Federal establishment.

The CIC has staff members who try to keep up with new publications in the various departments and agencies. For instance, Eleanor Kelly is the liaison with the USDA and tries to keep up with what the USDA has in the works.

Recently, GPA asked USDA agencies to suggest possible new publications for the USDA Fact Sheet series. Out of more than 100 suggested titles, a committee of 15 people in GPA and the agencies ranked the titles and selected the top 28. The GPA Publishing Center narrowed that list to 10 titles of most interest to the general public and sent the list to CIC to check out.

The report is back and CIC finds that Food and Drug is just finishing off a publication on "salt" and one on "sugar," two of the USDA suggestions. Further, the Department of Energy is developing a publication on "How to choose an efficient home appliance," and has one on "How to build a home solar heater," and "How to save money by insulating your water heater," three more of USDA's candidates.

It proves once again that it pays to check around to see what others are already doing.

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PUBLICATION PLANNING

As a step toward closer coordination and better planning of USDA publications, Assistant Secretary Jim Webster has asked agency administrators and information directors to activate agency publication planning committees. They'll meet quarterly to:

Recommend needed publications...approve pubs. before the manuscripts are written...strive for better balance in USDA pub. offerings...reduce duplication...work with land-grant institutions on cooperative publishing...review free and "for sale" pub. listings...provide for others to "ride" printing orders...and track publications through the system.

Representatives of GPA's Publication Policy and Management Branch will sit in on committee meetings.

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HERBS AROUSE THE PRESS

Last week the USDA dedicated a new 2-acre herb garden at the National Arboretum. It was the culmination of a long-time effort by herb and garden groups to have a national herb garden that promises to be one of the world's greatest. The evening dedication, attended by more than 1,200 people, included such notable speakers as Mrs. Mondale, Congressman Jamie Whitten, Chairman of the Appropriations Committee, and Secretary Bob Bergland.

Preceding the evening dedication was a noon press luncheon that pulled many press notables, thanks to the energetic efforts of Kate Alfrend and others in GPA, and SEA information.

If you want to see the new Herb Garden, the hours at the National Arboretum are: 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday and from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

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YEARBOOK "OLD HAT"?

Since the Yearbook of Agriculture dates from 1894, it's only natural that once in awhile someone wonders aloud whether the USDA should be putting out a Yearbook anymore. Appropriately, a surprising statistic has just surfaced.

Eleanor Kelly recently sent GPA's Publishing Center the results of the latest Consumer Information Center survey of public orders for 138 "free of charge" Government publications. Of the top 20 "most requested" publications, 12 were from USDA. Claude Gifford sorted out the 20 titles and their backgrounds, and guess what: 8 of the 12 were reprinted chapters or sections from recent Yearbooks of Agriculture.

So it's not how long you've been around that counts--86 years for the Yearbook--but whether you keep up to date.

Frank Samay, of GPA's Utilization and Inquiries Branch, checked to see how many Yearbook chapter reprints have been distributed by the Consumer Information Center since that outlet started offering them in FY-75. Samay has come up with the amazing figure of 9,200,000. That's a good example of getting secondary uses for a publication and stretching the input that goes into the Yearbook.

Gifford raises an interesting question: How many of those reprints, which represent more than two dozen titles, would have been developed into USDA publications if the annual deadline for the Yearbook hadn't been breathing down our necks?

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"FOOD" A RECORD SETTER

While mentioning the top publications in the Consumer Information Center survey, we should pause to salute No. 1, which was FOOD--that colorful SEA nutrition booklet published last September.

Not only was FOOD the "most requested" of all 138 Government publications, but it set a new record: 34 percent of the people who asked for CIC publications in the recent survey, included FOOD in their request. Statistically, that's a giant leap over the 25 to 30 percent that usually puts a No. 1 publication at the top of the heap.

The No. 1, 2 and 3 publications this time were all related to food--and all were USDA publications. That, too, is a record for the USDA.

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WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT

What do employees want in their employee publication? Sometimes it's what they aren't getting and the kind of stuff they aren't sending to the publication. (Which reminds me, have you sent anything to "Inside" lately?)

Anyway...the Federal Grain Inspection Service has asked its employees for ideas and comments about its employee newsletter, "The Conveyor." Employees asked for:

More newsy and up-to-date material...more articles about the difficult jobs FGIS people do...more profiles on work units in the field...more stories to build prestige and boost morale...a letters-to-the-editor column...more from the field and less from Washington...more about what non-supervisory people are doing...and shorter stories, more items, and more pictures.

Sounds reasonable.

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ALL YOU WANT TO KNOW...

Do you know: How to get microfilm from the National Agricultural Library? How to get a document delivered to you from NAL if you're in the USDA, and if you're not? What NAL information is on automated retrieval? What AGRICOLA and the Current Awareness

and Literature Service (CALS) are? Where the USDA Field Libraries are...with their phone numbers?

If you do, read no further. If you don't, you can find the answers to these and other questions about the Technical Information Systems, which includes the National Agricultural Library and related information services, by getting a copy of Guide to Services. Write to Kathleen Stepney, Reference Section, Technical Information Systems, National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Maryland 20705 to get a copy.

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YOUR OWN HANDS

While mentioning the Technical Information Systems, let's include a word about a new TIS project called "Your Own Hands." TIS is working to link word processors, such as a Lanier, to powerful existing online information retrieval systems, and/or to mini-computers" to build your own system.

It would go something like this: Let's say you have a remote "smart terminal" Lanier word processor. You could link it by phone to TIS' AGRICOLA specialized data base. You could sit there and "sort" information in alphabetical order, "extract" certain categories or titles, "report" information in new form, and "perform" two or more operations at one time. Does that sound complicated? Well, it's not, says TIS--it's "innovative, inexpensive, and easy," they swear.

They've already demonstrated hooking a "smart terminal" to a pilot file of "Extension Narrative Accomplishments," and then to the CRIS file (Current Research Information System) on a different system. "The operator selected records from each file, stored them in the word processor memory, and then merged and reformed them using flexible text-editing capabilities (reformatting, addition, deletion, sorting)." So there!

You might as well get used to things like that. If you don't, the world will pass you by, OBAC (obsoleted by a computer).

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SUTTON ON THE STUMP

The rapidly developing world of computer graphics will be stressed by the National Computer Graphics Association meeting in Arlington, Va., this week. Dave Sutton, GPA's Asst. Director for Graphic Arts, will be on the program to talk about making "rational choices" and the basic rules of legibility, among other things. Dave will also make a presentation to the Design Management Institute, July 8, at the Palmer House in Chicago.

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SOCIAL NOTE

The editor of "Inside," Hal Taylor, is out of town marrying off his daughter Helen at Ithaca, N.Y., this week. He'll be back at the helm next week, giving you the "inside" dope about information here in "Inside."